El Adelantado Don Hernando de Soto

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This essay gives a good capsulized version of the life of Hernando de Soto and presents the Spanish point of view of the conquest. It is a point of view that allows for the expression of regional and national pride in the lives and accomplishments of the conquistadors. But it does not cover up the flaws of men such as De Soto, whose character encompassed as many notes of cruelty and caprice as of courage and nobility.

This essay should be read as a counterpoint to the immediately following biography of De Soto by Paul Hoffman, a senior American historian with much experience in the field. Yet the spirit and verve of Rocío Sánchez Rubio's article catches well the spirit and nature of the conquistador class, men, such as Hernando de Soto, who helped elevate Spain to a world-class power in the sixteenth century.

The finer points of modern archaeological debate—such as where exactly the De Soto *entrada* passed through the American Southeast and what was the effect of the Spanish expedition on Native American peoples—are addressed in this essay only in passing, if at all. However, for those wishing a general perspective on De Soto, his life and times, this is an informative place to begin.

The Conquistador

Like all human endeavors, the Spanish conquest of America was filled with "lights and shadows." Its principal figures have been caught between

the Black Legend on the one hand and blind heroic adoration on the other, yet they deserve to be seen as they actually were: men of their times. Only in this way can a truly critical history of their accomplishments be written.

Despite the fact that the conquest was a collective event, individuals—the triumph of the hero—stand out from the rest. The common features that characterized these men allow us to talk of a "Generation of the Conquista." Born between 1474 and 1504, they left for America very young, issuing mostly from Andalusia, Castille, and Extremadura; second-born sons of the petty nobility, impoverished noblemen and commoners, their social and cultural origins were diverse.

Their heyday was between 1510 and 1545, coinciding with the reign of Emperor Charles V. Religious by conviction, their sword served not only the king, but also served God. They became divine instruments, waging a holy war that closely paralleled the one against the Turks during the same period.

They gained experience in the Antilles and became acclimated there before making the great leap to the mainland. The vast continents of the Americas were marked by diverse climates, topography, vegetation, and fauna, as well as sharp contrasts in the customs, attitudes, and rituals of their inhabitants. The constant challenges that the New World offered these conquistadors called for remarkable powers of adaptation. Through their efforts they learned to respect this new world they trod upon.

With few resources and lacking names or reputations, they left the Peninsula seeking honor, fame, and social and economic betterment in the New World. The great figures of the conquest were virtually unknown when they began their journeys to America. In their ambition and desire to stand out above others, they often refused to place themselves directly under the patronage of either the king's representatives or the leading captains. They did appeal to the monarch, but only to seek those offices and titles needed to undertake new adventures of conquest. Conflicts and lawsuits brought about by disputes over jurisdictional authority multiplied among the conquistadors, and these struggles for control of the subdued territories sometimes ended tragically.

Without financial support from the crown, they personally financed every new expedition. If too expensive for one, they often formed partnerships. In exchange, they shared overseeing and recruiting the members of the expedition, and the parties tacitly agreed to share the benefits obtained. Thus, the conquest was primarily the fruit of private enterprise.

In the following pages we will reconstruct the life of Hernando de Soto, a

representative example of the Spanish conquistador. Many of the above-mentioned characteristics and circumstances can be applied to this Extremaduran. This is the story of a conquistador, a man whose life followed the knife edge between glory and failure; it was a life filled not only with wealth, triumph, and satisfaction, but also with toil, want, and suffering.

> The adelantado Hernando de Soto was . . . of more than medium build, of a very good appearance, looked well on foot and on horseback, he was of cheerful countenance, dark in color, skillful on both saddles, and more on the genet than the bridle. He was extremely patient in toil and in need, so much so that seeing the patience and suffering of their Captain General was his soldiers' greatest comfort in the midst of their own afflictions.
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> He was fortunate in the individual journeys that he himself undertook, although not in the principal one, for life failed him at the greatest moment.
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> . . . He was severe in punishing military misdemeanors; others he pardoned easily. He honored soldiers greatly, those who were virtuous and courageous. He was most courageous, so much that wherever he went he entered the fighting in pitched battle; he cleared the way with room enough for ten of his own to pass, and so they all admitted: that ten lances from all his army were not worth as much as his.
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> This brave captain had in war a notable and most memorable trait, —in the sudden attacks that the enemy visited on his camp, by day he was always the first or second to go out in arms, and never third; and in those by night he never was the second, but always the first to appear having readied himself to go out [before retiring]. The alarm he always gave himself.
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> —The Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega

Controversy over De Soto's Birth

Biographers are often frustrated by the lack of good documentation. Either the relevant documentation has not survived, or the existing sources contain contradictions, or both. The birth and childhood of people who later gained fame are often obscure. Such is the case with Hernando de Soto. Leonor Arias Tinoco, a native of Badajoz, gave birth to him some time between 1495 and 1500; the exact date is not known, since, in the Castille of the late fifteenth century, parish records were not regularly kept. These only became widespread after the Council of Trent in 1545.

Determining the place of De Soto's birth is even more problematic than fixing its date. As with many who figured prominently in the discovery and

conquest of the New World—for example, another illustrious Extremaduran, Pedro de Valdivia, and even the great discoverer, Christopher Columbus—the uncertainty about De Soto's birthplace has given rise to polemics and disagreements. Three towns contend for the honor of being considered the birthplace of the Adelantado de la Florida: Jerez de los Caballeros, Barcarrota (formerly Villanueva de Barcarrota), and, to a lesser extent, Badajoz. We owe the confusion to three chroniclers who portray him as having been born in each of the above-mentioned places: Pedro Pizarro, the Fidalgo de Elvas, and the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega. The first two were contemporaries of De Soto, and the third was not far removed from the events of his life.

Pedro Pizarro recorded the conquest of Peru, where Hernando de Soto played a significant role, and he identifies Badajoz as De Soto's birthplace. The Fidalgo de Elvas, who accompanied the *adelantado* in the expedition to Florida, declares De Soto a native of Jerez de los Caballeros, where his father, Francisco Méndez de Soto, was born. Finally, the Inca, Garcilaso, relates in his *Crónica sobre la conquista de la Florida:* "The adelantado Hernando de Soto . . . was a native of Villanueva de Barcarrota."

Over time, different authors have adopted the views of one or another of these three sixteenth-century chroniclers, so that each option gained a certain following. In the end, Garcilaso's view emerged as the most popular.

There are other important documents related to De Soto in the Archivo Histórico Nacional of Madrid and in the Archivo General de Indias of Seville. The first of these preserves the adelantado's papers of admission into the Order of Santiago. That honor was conferred upon De Soto by the king when the conquistador left for Florida, as a reward for the many services he had rendered. The heading of this document reads: "Santiago 1537. The adelantado Hernando de Soto, a native of *Xerez* . . . " [emphasis added]. The file includes the testimony of several persons who declared that they knew De Soto and his ancestors. While they mention his nobility and his more or less protracted stays in Badajoz, all of them confirm that Jerez was his birthplace. The Sevillan archives contain the last will and testament that Hernando signed on May 13, 1539, in San Cristóbal de la Habana, a few days before beginning the expedition to Florida. In it he made several bequests that were ultimately to be carried out in Jerez. Moreover, he stated his wish to be buried alongside his parents in the Church of San Miguel in Jerez. There can be no doubt that his ties to Jerez must have been important, whether he was born there or not.

But there are also arguments in favor of Barcarrota that lend credibility to that town's claims. De Soto's parents frequently traveled between Jerez and

Badajoz, spending the first years of their marriage in these two towns. However, it is difficult to believe that the bond between the conquistador and Barcarrota could have developed solely from such happenstance, especially when we consider the enthusiastic response among its inhabitants in enlisting for the expedition to Florida. And the honor and glory claimed by Barcarrota as the birthplace of Hernando de Soto is not lacking in concrete symbols; Barcarrotians still feel proud to preserve the house where their renowned son once "lived." The frequent contacts between this town and the "Society of Knights of Bradenton" in Florida, who annually travel from Florida to Barcarrota to commemorate De Soto, help to reinforce this belief. The meetings, colorful and picturesque, commemorate the expedition 450 years ago when the conquistador and a few hundred Spaniards landed on the coast of Florida to begin their memorable endeavor. These reunions also keep intact Barcarrota's claim to fame as the birthplace of the adelantado.

Whatever the place of his birth, De Soto was indisputably from Extremadura. Like him, many Extremadurans, some of them well known and written about (Pizarro, Cortés, Alvarado, Valdivia, Orellana, Balboa . . . and others, unfortunately anonymous), abandoned their homeland and undertook a great endeavor in search of the fame and fortune that were in such short supply in Extremadura, but so invitingly available to the bold and daring in the New World.

Encounter with the New World

If Hernando de Soto's birth is obscure, the first years of his life are impenetrable. The son of a noble family, though of modest means, his childhood was spent on horseback between Badajoz and Jerez de los Caballeros, accompanied by his three siblings: Catalina, María, and Juan Méndez de Soto. We do not know what sort of education he received; nevertheless, he must have been familiar with the "teachings" and rumors about America that circulated during his childhood and adolescence.

From the moment when Columbus first returned from the New World, a fascination with this exotic, unknown region spread through Castille. An expedition to the isthmus of Panama by another Extremaduran, Vasco Núñez de Balboa, opened the doors to the immense territory still to be discovered and to legends of wealthy kingdoms farther south. Balboa's expedition began in Nuestra Señora La Antigua, a town that Balboa himself founded on the coast of Darién (now Panama), and ended when he reached

the South Seas—the name given to the Pacific Ocean. The Indians encountered during his trip across the isthmus all pointed Balboa to the existence of a great people to the south, possessing immense riches.

Pedrarias's Expedition

The reports brought back by the discoverer of the South Seas prompted King Ferdinand to organize a great expedition. His first measure was to name Pedro Arias de Avila governor and captain general of Castilla del Oro, the suggestive name given to this country, which captured the aura of wealth created by Balboa's reports. The offices granted to this native of Segovia, better known as Pedrarias Dávila, gave him the power to organize, subdue, and colonize the new territories. He was to settle in the Darién, in the aforementioned Nuestra Señora La Antigua.

Rumors of the wealth that could be obtained by participating in the expedition spread throughout Spain and proved very powerful in attracting volunteers. Besides the potential wealth offered by that part of the world, there were the many recompenses and benefices that the Catholic king would grant to anyone willing to embark in order to populate and colonize Castilla del Oro. The concessions of land, houses, and mansions, the right to participate in the apportionment of Indians, the exploitation of mines, the exemption from taxes and tariffs—these, among other privileges, facilitated the preparations. Hundreds of Castillians, blinded by the promises of wealth, rushed to enlist. Among those, still an adolescent, was Hernando de Soto. The resources deployed (twenty-five ships), the participating contingent (around two thousand people), and the direct involvement of the crown, which paid for and organized the preparations to the last detail, made this expedition unique in the history of America. This is even more striking if we consider that later enterprises involving discovery, conquest, or colonization were of a private nature; they were financed by the conquistadors themselves, the sovereign limiting himself to the legal recognition of the new possessions.

The expedition left San Lúcar de Barrameda on April 11, 1514; with De Soto traveled a group of individuals who, like him, gained renown in the conquest and exploration of the American continent: Bernal Díaz del Castillo (chronicler of the conquest of Peru), Diego de Almagro, Sebastián de Benalcázar, Hernando Luque, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, and Pascual de Andagoya, to name but a few.

When the fleet arrived at La Antigua on June 29, Pedrarias Dávila took possession of the governorship of Castilla del Oro. Unfortunately, this site, which three months earlier had been idealized and had seemed a kind of paradise, turned out to be a veritable hell. The small colony was soon overwhelmed by this influx of adventurers from the Peninsula. Food soon became scarce, and the situation turned terribly critical. The words of Fernández de Oviedo, a direct witness of these events, are eloquent. He described the colony's experience and the prevailing atmosphere: "The men [were] starving in the streets. . . . Every day fifteen or twenty of them died . . . and in a short time more than five hundred men died. . . . Some returned to Spain and others moved to these our islands Española and Cuba and Jamaica and San Juan. . . . Those who died or departed were more numerous than those who were left in the land."

The Attainment of a Name

Hernando de Soto's early arrival in the New World allowed him to begin his brilliant military career by witnessing and participating in many different attempts at expansion into the lands of Central America.

In order to alleviate the difficult circumstances enveloping the small colony, Governor Pedrarias ordered incursions into the northern as well as the southern parts of the Darién. The expeditions to the south paved the way for the campaign that the Extremaduran (Trujillo) Francisco Pizarro launched years later to conquer the coveted Inca empire. De Soto must have figured in one of these expansionary incursions, especially given his ability as a rider, since the governor named him "Captain of the men on horseback." Other testimonies remain of his excellence in the saddle; the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega described him as "skillful on both saddles, and more on the genet than the bridle," later calling him "one of the best lances that have come to the New World, and few as good and none better, unless it were that of Gonzalo Pizarro." A famous episode occurred during the conquest of Peru when he used his skill as a rider to impress the Inca emperor, Atahualpa.

Bearing the title of captain, he must have been an eyewitness to the stormy relations between Pedrarias Dávila and Vasco Núñez de Balboa, as well as to the tragic end of their confrontations.

The quarrels between these men began with the arrival of the governor in La Antigua. They settled on a short truce in 1516 after the marriage by proxy of Balboa and María, Pedrarias's daughter. However, the truce was

broken by Pedrarias, who accused Balboa of taking advantage of his title (as a reward for his services, the king had named Balboa adelantado of the South Seas and general of two provinces—he was still subject to the governor's authority, however), and that Balboa, furthermore, was infringing upon his jurisdiction by usurping the crown's land. Charged with treason and condemned to death, Vasco Núñez was executed in January of 1519.

After the death of Balboa, the center of operations was moved to Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Panamá, a city founded by Pedrarias when he realized that movement to both the north and south would be more feasible from the Pacific Coast. Very soon this city, the first to be founded on the Pacific Ocean, replaced Nuestra Señora de La Antigua as the capital of Castilla del Oro. From here De Soto embarked on expeditions where—without yet playing a prominent role—he performed brilliant acts that increased his fame and merit in the eyes of the governor and his comrades. In the most significant episode, he personally rescued Master Espinosa, a lawyer, from the Indians during an expedition led by De Soto and Francisco Pizarro, which in 1520 attempted to expand the colony toward the territories of Costa Rica and Veragua.

Four years later Hernando was one of the captains under Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, whom Pedrarias had entrusted with the conquest of Nicaragua. De Soto again had the opportunity to demonstrate his personal loyalty to Pedrarias.

Hernández de Córdoba, after advancing without difficulty and having founded several towns and cities (León, Granada) in Nicaragua, tried to dissociate himself from the government of Castilla del Oro. He petitioned the king to make him the governor of Nicaragua; however, he found that the majority of his troops opposed him, including De Soto, who was imprisoned. He was freed by Captain Francisco Compañón, a lifelong friend of his. Together they returned to Panama and informed the governor of the chief expeditionary's behavior. Hernández de Córdoba was later executed in León, a city which he founded.

This display of absolute fidelity to Pedrarias increased De Soto's popularity to the point that the future adelantado of Florida began to become known outside the American territories. This, added to his participation in the expansion of Castilla del Oro throughout the Central American region, earned him prestige and respect in courtly circles. When he returned to Castille from Isla de La Española in 1526, Charles V could not find a better ambassador to send to Lisbon to rescue Gonzalo Gómez de Espinosa. This

man, along with others, had accompanied Juan Sebastian Elcano in his voyage of circumnavigation, and they had been imprisoned by the Portuguese and lost their ship.

We do not know the outcome of his trip nor of his negotiations, nor do we know the date of his return to America. In 1529, De Soto was in Nicaragua again, where he lived as one of the richest and most influential inhabitants of León. This did not last long, however. Rarely were such men satisfied with the status gained at any given moment. They frequently exchanged the comfort and luxury that their previous expeditions had yielded for the privations, discomfort, and possible death that accompanied a new endeavor. Their desire for fame and greater riches drove them to invest their belongings in new expeditions. In 1531, Hernando de Soto participated in the final drive to conquer the Inca empire, an endeavor that up to that time had cost a great deal of effort.

The Conquest of Peru

The first years of Castilla del Oro were dominated by constant attempts to expand toward the south. In that direction lay the kingdom that, according to Panamanian Indians, possessed fabulous wealth. It was not until Asunción de Panamá was founded on the Pacific that access to Peru was made possible.

Following the failed expedition by Pascual de Andagoya in 1522, Francisco Pizarro, an Extremaduran (Trujillo) who had arrived in the Indies in 1502 and distinguished himself militarily under Pedrarias, began his incursions in 1524. He formed a partnership with Diego de Almagro, a native of La Mancha, and the Andalusian cleric Hernando Luque. After two unsuccessful attempts, the reticence and obstacles placed in Pizarro's path by Governor Pedrarias, by then an old man, became too much for him. He returned to Spain and received express authorization from the emperor: in 1530, by means of an agreement signed in Toledo, Pizarro was entrusted with the conquest of Peru and was named governor, captain general, and adelantado. Accompanied by his brothers and several contingents of Extremadurans, he returned to Panama to begin the preparations.

In order to launch an enterprise of that caliber, Pizarro had to seek people willing to participate in the expedition, and to risk their possessions and capital. Since Hernán Ponce de León was a member of the Pizarro group, it

is only natural that his longtime friend, Hernando de Soto, was also included; the pair formed a partnership, agreeing to divide between them the profits obtained in battle. In this way, De Soto abandoned the privileges and comfort of León and was granted, through Ponce's exertions, the most important subordinate position in the army that embarked for Peru. In addition, he was promised that he would be made the lord of the first large town to be conquered.

Peru

All of the territory that lay to the south of Panama, beyond the Gulf of San Miguel, was known as Birú, Pirú, or Perú. The Tahuantinsuyu—a name used by the Incas to refer to their dominions—included today's Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and a part of northern Chile.

The Inca empire was forged from different tribes of the Quechua race and culture that originated in the Altiplano and Lake Titicaca. The Incas founded their capital in Cuzco, and from this city they expanded outward, subduing the length and breadth of Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. The expansion, which took place in less than two centuries, respected the traditions of each conquered tribe; however, the vastness of the territory and its topography were not propitious for political unity, and constant crises and conflicts drove the ruling caste to maintain an authoritarian and centralized regime.

Of the approximately eight million persons in Tahuantinsuyu, the inhabitants of the northern lands were the most troublesome. They were the last to be assimilated by the empire, and the political, economic, and social structures that the Incas tried to impose on them did not take root there.

At the time that the Spaniards began the conquest of Peru, the empire was experiencing its gravest crisis ever: the problem of dynastic succession. Upon the death of Huayna Capac, the last Great Inca, the unity of the empire was shattered by two of his children: Huáscar and Atahualpa. The first was the legitimate heir, since he was a *coya*'s son, that is, a queen's son. He controlled the greater part of the empire with the support of virtually the entire nobility of Cuzco. Atahualpa, the son of a *ñusta*, or royal maid, settled with his followers in Quito. Civil war was inevitable, and Atahualpa emerged victorious in the struggle when he took Huáscar prisoner. He proclaimed himself the only Inca and received the imperial *lauto*, a symbol of sovereignty.

Conditions That Favored the Conquest

The Spanish endeavors in the New World during the sixteenth century have been frequently characterized as heroic, and their principal figures have been elevated to the rank of demigods. Without belittling the daring and valor that they demonstrated, we have to admit that terms such as hero, feat, epic, geste, prowess, etc., so often used in relating the story of the conquest can be replaced in many instances by strategist, military expert, diplomacy, cleverness, and ability. These words give a more human dimension to the history of those events.

In the case of the conquest of Peru, it is unthinkable to suppose that a few hundred Spaniards could have single-handedly subdued a great and vast empire such as that of the Incas. The empire possessed an army of potentially thousands of male subjects, ready at any moment for the draft.

The conquistadors skillfully capitalized on the strife among the descendants of Huayna Capac. Pizarro, for example, gained the assistance of the defeated Huáscar's followers, who were the sworn enemies of Atahualpa. In a similar fashion, Pizarro won over different peoples under the control of the Incas who were discontented over the domination and demands by their Inca conquerors. In their view of things, the Spaniards were coming to liberate them from the yoke of the Incas. They expressed this belief at the mythological level as they identified the strangers with the "messengers of Viracocha," the emissaries of the god that created the world. Like that supreme being, the foreigners wore beards and had emerged from the waters (the ocean) where the god Viracocha had disappeared a long time before. Their reappearance could only mean one thing: the messengers would carry out the divine vengeance and would defeat the destroyers of the empire.

A similar situation arose during the conquest of Mexico. Hernán Cortés took advantage of the Indians' image of him as a demigod to establish his authority in the Aztec empire. In addition, he received help from the natives, who were tired of submission to the Aztecs, whom they viewed as their oppressors.

These circumstances, together with the weapons and horses they brought, gave the conquistadors the element of surprise that they needed to gain the fear and respect of the local people. However, as the Indians perceived that the newcomers suffered and died just like them and were therefore merely human, they gradually became less vulnerable to their initial beliefs. Yet, one must praise the Spaniards' effort and courage at times like these, alone in those unknown, inhospitable, and hostile places.

The Arrival of the Spaniards in Peru

On board three ships obtained for them by Hernán Ponce de León, the expedition led by Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro embarked, heading south. It was January of 1531, and the group consisted of 180 soldiers, three friars, and thirty-seven horses.

Almost two years went by before Francisco Pizarro penetrated the land in Peru to which he had been named governor. The expedition, some of its members advancing by land and others by sea, reached Coyoacan. At this point it was determined that De Soto should return to Panama to recruit new contingents of troops. No problems were foreseen in the enlistment of men, given the riches that everyone expected to find. De Soto, having obtained some reinforcements, rejoined the ranks of the scouting expedition on the island of Puná, where the natives had killed some of the members of the expedition. According to the historian Diego de Trujillo, the first Spanish woman to tread on that soil was among the persons that arrived with Hernando de Soto; her name was Juana Hernández.

They all marched together until reaching Túmbez, the gateway to Peru, where they learned of the civil war then engulfing the empire. Advancing through the Tangarara Valley, the favorable terrain encouraged the Spaniards to found their first city, giving it the name San Miguel; it would later be moved to the Piura River valley, and would be known from then on as San Miguel de Piura. Other cities were established along their trajectory, always with a twofold purpose: to secure the colonization and, above all, to serve as bases or platforms from which new incursions could be launched.

Of the land conquered thus far, Hernando de Soto received the district and lordship of Túmbez. The promise made to him at the beginning of the expedition was thus fulfilled.

After five months in San Miguel, they left a detachment in that city as a base for their rear guard. They turned toward Cajamarca, near where the emperor Atahualpa was stationed with a large army. The Spanish troops numbered fewer than 180 men, and more than half did not have horses. Hernando de Soto, commanding forty soldiers, was sent on a reconnaissance mission into the mountains. De Soto and his scouts experienced *soroche*, the sickness of the high Andes caused by the altitude and the lack of oxygen. A number of De Soto's companions have left us a record of how, after crossing several localities, they came to a town called Caxas. Diego de Trujillo depicted their arrival and sojourn in this spot.

I went with him . . . and after twenty leagues we came upon a town called Caxas . . . and in it was one of Atabalipa's captains, with more than two thousand Indian warriors. And there were in that town three houses for secluded women who were called *mamaconas*. And since we entered and the women were taken out to the plaza, there were more than five hundred of them, and the captain gave many of them to the Spaniards, the captain of the Inca was greatly outraged and said: How dare you do this with Atabalipa staying twenty leagues from here?, because not one of you will remain alive. Then captain De Soto wrote to the governor about everything that was happening and about that Indian's arrogance. The governor responded that they should endure all his arrogance and we should lead him to believe that we were afraid of him. And so we brought him to Caruán, where everything about Atabalipa and his whereabouts became known.

Knowing where the Inca was stationed, Pizarro's armies continued their difficult march toward Cajamarca. "The going was so bad," wrote Hernando Pizarro, "that we would have made an easy match for them . . . , because even by making displays of ability we couldn't use the horses on the trail, and leaving the road rendered everyone, both on horseback and on foot, unstable and ineffective." The expedition halted for a few days in a town near Cajamarca. The chroniclers of the conquest of Peru give differing accounts of Atahualpa's reaction to the proximity of the Spaniards. According to some, the Inca was afraid, supposedly because it appeared that the prophecy of the arrival of the "children of the sun" was being fulfilled. In a more probable account, the emperor's attitude is portrayed as firm and menacing, since he was well aware of the small size of the foreign contingent advancing toward him. Even so, we may suppose that he felt some misgivings, although his position as emperor would not allow him to show them.

Encounter with Atahualpa and His Imprisonment

On November 15, 1532, the Cajamarca Valley lay at their feet. Far away, very near the baths at Konof, where hot springs still gush forth, they could see Atahualpa's encampment. The amazement and the impression that this sight caused was captured by Hernando Pizarro: "The Indians' camp looked like a very beautiful city. There were such a number of tents before our eyes that we all felt gripped by apprehension. We never would have imagined that the Indians could make a display of so much order, or possess such a num-

ber of tents and such magnificent ones. Until then nothing like it had been seen in the Indies, and despite the size of our Spanish army, the spectacle filled us with fear and confusion."

That same afternoon, once settled in Cajamarca, Pizarro sent Hernando de Soto as an ambassador; the Extremaduran thus became the first Castillian official to set eyes on Atahualpa. Francisco de Jerez, De Soto's companion, describes the meeting in his account of the conquest of Peru: "And the tyrant was at the door of his abode, sitting in a low seat and many Indians before him and women standing, almost surrounding him; and he had a woolen tassel that looked like silk . . . tied to his head with its cords . . . his eyes fixed on the ground without raising them to look anywhere."

Impatiently, the governor sent a second group, headed by his brother Hernando. The Inca's interview with the two Spanish captains has been described often enough, but the moment stands out when Atahualpa offered the governor's brother a cup of chicha: Hernando requested another for De Soto, stating that he was worthy of the same treatment. The emperor promised to approach Cajamarca the following day, and De Soto, before leaving, took part in a scene that impressed the Indian armies and Atahualpa himself: "A captain, Hernando de Soto, brought a small trained horse. . . . He exercised it about gracefully for a bit. The nag was spirited, foaming much at the mouth, at which, on seeing the rapidity with which it revolved, he (Atahualpa) marveled, although the people expressed more admiration among themselves. There was a great murmur, and a squadron of persons, seeing that the horse was coming towards them, drew back [the Indians had never seen a horse before]; which, those who did so paid for it that night with their lives because Atabalipa had them killed, because they had shown fear."

When the ambassadors returned, Pizarro and his men realized how untenable their situation was. They were eyewitnesses to the greatness, the resources, and the degree of organization of their enemies. It was then that Pizarro thought of capturing Atahualpa. He attempted to imitate Cortés, whose campaign in Mexico against the Aztecs had included the imprisonment of Moctezuma. Pizarro hoped that once he had been captured, the Inca's army would crumble and with it the empire.

The next day, in the midst of great pomp, Atahualpa headed for Cajamarca. The procession caused considerable admiration and made a great impression on the Spaniards. Father Valverde was chosen to read before the Inca a pronouncement whereby the Indians were required to accept the sovereignty

of the Spanish monarchs and the true faith. Pizarro, like so many other expedition leaders of his generation, did not consider himself an intruder in Peru. Invoking the legitimacy of his titles, he was certain that those territories belonged to him, and that Atahualpa was obliged to obey his authority. As we can imagine, the emperor did not understand one word of the cleric's speech. He demanded that everything taken by the Spaniards since they entered his dominions be returned. Valverde offered him a Bible. Atahualpa, after turning its pages, threw it to the ground, extremely irritated, and the Spaniards then sprang their trap. They began to fire on Atahualpa's retinue while the cavalry charged into the plaza. Atahualpa's companions fled, unable to react from fear of the animals and of the noise and fire issuing from the weapons. The emperor was made a prisoner in a few moments.

During his captivity, Atahualpa maintained his status of emperor, still carrying out the functions of an absolute monarch. He was allowed to surround himself with the members of his court who had not been killed in the attack. The chroniclers, amazed by the ceremonies that accompanied all his acts, have left us a description of the rituals of his daily life.

Hernando de Soto and Hernando Pizarro became regular members of the Inca's coterie and held long conversations with him. Antonio de Herrera confirms this and describes the friendly and conciliatory climate that existed in the Spanish encampment: "Captain Hernando de Soto was one of those whom Atahualpa liked the most. Everyone tried to please him and found his conversation entertaining, because he had learned to play chess and throw dice and spoke admirably and asked witty and ingenious questions."

As the days of his captivity went by, Atahualpa observed the Spaniards' interest in precious metals. He offered, in exchange for his freedom, to fill the room where he was imprisoned with gold and silver in the space of forty days. Using safe conduct passes issued by the Inca, several of the Spanish captains crisscrossed Peru, gathering the precious metals. The ransom was never completely collected, since after some time Almagro proposed that they divide among themselves the riches obtained so far. Hernando de Soto was among those who benefited most from the division; his share amounted to about eighteen thousand gold pesos and eight hundred silver marks, an immense sum at that time.

Meanwhile, Atahualpa had his brother Huáscar killed, because he was afraid that Pizarro would enter into negotiations with him. The Spaniards used this act, together with false accusations of conspiracy, to condemn the emperor to death.

Death of Atahualpa and Entry into Cuzco

Once the ransom was divided, Hernando Pizarro was sent back to Spain. He was to report on the progress of the conquest and to deliver the king's fifth, for one-fifth of all the wealth obtained in the conquest belonged to the royal treasury and had to be deposited in the House of Trade of Seville as a mandatory tax. While the governor's brother returned to the Peninsula, Hernando de Soto was sent on a reconnaissance mission. The absence of both men, who were considered the Inca's best friends, has prompted certain authors to suggest that a premeditated plan existed to eliminate any possible defense for Atahualpa. Perhaps. In any case, the Spaniards charged the emperor with treason, believing that the army in Quito was preparing to attack them upon his command (these rumors later proved to have no basis in fact). The emperor was indicted and condemned to death, the sentence being carried out on July 26, 1533. Not all the Castillians were pleased by the execution; several of the chroniclers actually criticized it and questioned its legality. And even in Spain, in certain courtly circles, some regret became apparent over what was felt to have been an unwise decision.

With Atahualpa dead, anarchy spread. To prevent this, a new Inca had to be named, and the choice fell to Tupac Huallpa, another of Huayna Capac's sons.

The Spaniards had been in Cajamarca for eight months before the conquest of Peru began to roll again. With the aid of some of the Indians—mostly Quechua followers of the dead Huáscar—they began the march toward Cuzco, the capital of the empire. Advancing through Huamachuco, Andamarca, and Huaylá, they reached Jauja on October 11, where the newly elected Inca died. By then they were so close to Cuzco that De Soto was sent to reconnoiter the way, commanding a cavalry platoon. It was on this mission that he was violently attacked by the armies from Quito. Had it not been for Almagro's intervention, the attack could have cost him his life.

On November 14, 1533, the Spaniards and the Quechuas made their entrance into the capital. They were met with a display of gratitude from the inhabitants, who believed that the Castillians had come to avenge Huáscar and to restore the empire. It was here that Manco Inca Yupanqui, another of Huayna Capac's sons, was crowned emperor. Francisco Pizarro named Hernando de Soto lieutenant governor of the city of Cuzco as a reward for services rendered.

In this way the Spaniards took possession of the Inca empire. The

sovereigns—Atahualpa and Huáscar—who had caused the civil war were dead; the armies from Quito were retreating; and the new sovereign, a survivor of the royal family, was agreeable to Spanish interests. The conquistadors spread through the territory, founding cities and completing the conquest.

Hernando de Soto's last action in Peru was to participate in the founding of Pizarro's new capital city of Lima in 1535. A year later he was on his way to Spain. We can be certain that he already had the adventure of Florida in mind.

Return to Spain

Hernando de Soto returned to Spain in 1536. He accomplished two things during his stay on the Peninsula: he married Isabel de Bobadilla, and he obtained the capitulación for the conquest of Florida.

The prestige and fortune he had obtained in the New World allowed him to make an alliance with one of the oldest Castillian families. De Soto married Isabel de Bobadilla, daughter of the renowned governor of Castilla del Oro, Pedro Arias de Avila, by then dead. The indenture for the dowry, preserved in the Archivo General de Indias, was granted in Valladolid on November 14, 1536; in it are enumerated all the possessions that Pedrarias's daughter brought to the union. The indenture, signed by her mother, by Isabel de Bobadilla, and by De Soto himself, reads as follows:

> . . . I give you and promise you as a dowry with said Ysabel de Bobadilla, my daughter . . . all the bovine cattle with their offspring that remained from said governor, my lord and husband in Panama, on the Mainland, with all his cattle and the slaves that tend it and the mares that accompany said cattle. . . .
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> Likewise, I want him to have the totality of said cattle and herds that the convent and monastery of the devout house of Señor Santo Domingo, outside the city of Piedrahita, ceded in my favor, by reason of the habit and profession made and taken by fray Francisco de Bobadilla, my son, in said monastery. . . .
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> . . . and I, said captain Hernando de Soto, who am present, concede and acknowledge by the present letter that I accept and receive this abovementioned contract and promise and obligate myself, said dowry having been given and delivered to me, to consider it . . . as the dowry of said doña Ysabel de Bobadilla, my spouse and wife. . . .